

Abdullah was in his study when she found him. He was bent over an open desk drawer, his back to her. She went around to the front of the desk, like a secretary come to announce an appointment. She would be businesslike, at least until she had confirmed her suspicions. She cleared her throat and he turned to look at her.

"You smell of za'atar," he said. "Come here, za'atarooni." He waved her over to him.

"You always knew how to flatter a girl, didn't you?"

She said this without a smile.

"What did you find at the market this time?" he asked.

"No, I think the question is, what did you find at the market? I hear you've been buying ugly onyx pendants there, and I imagine it's not to punish me. You're too cheap to spend that kind of money just to make fun."

Abdullah's face fell, and she knew then that it was true.

"Did you find her at the market, too? Buy her like a little slave girl?"

"Habibti," he started.

"It hasn't been that long since men could do that. Are you keeping a concubine, Sheikh Abdullah?"

Her voice was filled with cruelty and contempt, which surprised her. She had never spoken to her husband in that tone before, but then again, she had not known that she was to become the senior wife, mother of his children, or whatever title he would give her as appeasement. Abdullah was silent for several minutes. Outside, she heard a lawnmower kick on. She closed her eyes, willed herself to faint. It was too painful that the rest of the world kept moving while her life was ravaged.

"Rosie, I was waiting for the right time to tell you. And she's not a concubine. Please don't insult her. She's my wife, before God."

" 'Before God?' Don't you dare hang this on religion, Abdullah.

The world would be an ugly place if we all did the things our good books say we can." She paused. "How long has it been?"

"Two years."

"Jesus."

She felt bile rising in her throat. She wanted to run at him, shove him back against the bookshelf, to make him hold her or push her away. But the large walnut desk was in the way, and she felt bound to where she stood, exhausted by his confession and all that it meant for their family. The sun spilled into the room, just like it did every other day. She fixed her eyes on the empty sleeve of her husband's shirt, where she knew his arm stopped just before the knob of his wrist. She didn't even know how he'd lost his hand all those years ago. For a while, she'd probed for an explanation, but he was secretive about the circumstances. Now it seemed like further proof that she had absolutely no idea who her husband was. For all she knew, a furious mistress could have sawed off his hand.

He'd been married to another woman for two years. Her next question no longer mattered. She smoothed down her skirt, then turned and walked toward the door. That question was why, but after two years, it was too late to ask why. Instead, she grabbed a jade bookend from the shelf, turned and heaved it toward him. He moved easily out of the way, which only further infuriated her.

"Pig!" she shouted. Then, more quietly, "You've ruined us."

Upstairs in her bathroom, she locked the door and then lay down on the thick, cream-colored rug that covered the tile. It smelled of the rose-scented detergent that Abdullah insisted they use because it reminded him of his mother. Rosalie turned her cheek to one side and waited until she no longer felt like vomiting. This took two days.